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Washington Conclave

TOP U.S. officials have been in conference at the White House for several days. The talks began on July 21, six hours after Defence Secretary McNamara returned from South Vietnam. Besides President Johnson and McNamara, they are attended by Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA director Raborn, and several presidential aides. They are discussing what to do next about Vietnam, where the situation has been delicately described by McNamara as having "many aspects of deterioration."

The atmosphere of stealth and secrecy in which the conference is being held, and the haste with which it was convened, have prompted several press writers to compare it with the Rome Conclaves. But, unlike these, the decisions are already known. In fact, the U.S. press suggests that the conference was not called to work out decisions. Writes the *New York Herald Tribune* (July 23): "The real purpose of this set of dramatic, highly publicized conferences was to prepare the nation and Congress to accept some hard new decisions that already have been made."

And the decisions, according to press sources, are as follows. First, continued accelerated build-up of U.S. armed forces in South Vietnam, the target being 200,000 or 250,000 men by the close of the year. This might necessitate the calling up of reserves.

Second, all American troops concentrated in South Vietnam are to be employed in combat operations. In fact, the so-called U.S. "support units" have already been re-deleg-

ated (on July 21) as the "United States Army in Vietnam."

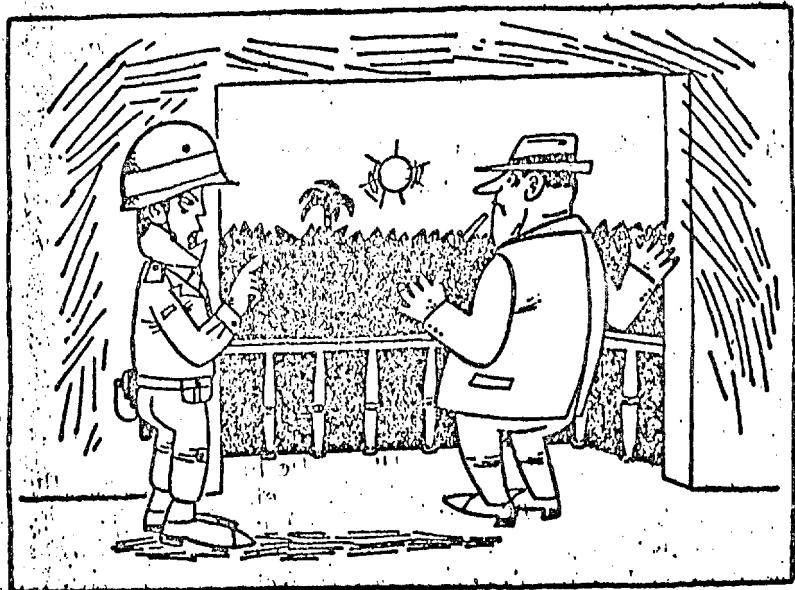
Third, a joint U.S.-South Vietnam command will be set up to direct operations against the National-Liberation Front forces. Commenting on this decision on July 21, the Associated Press said: "In a joint command system the U.S., with its greater ultimate resources of arms and men, would surely have to assume primary responsibility."

Each of these decisions taken separately signifies a further step in escalation. Together they signify transition to a qualitatively new phase in the war: what began as in-

tervention in an internal conflict has grown into undisguised, open aggression against the people of Vietnam. The puppet regime and its army are no longer taken into account. Washington strategists pin all their hopes on the huge American force. In other words, what Washington feared so much has now become a stark reality. Step by step the American government has drawn the country into a major ground war in an area thousands of miles away from the United States; in a war, moreover, that stands absolutely no chance of success, but holds out terrifying risks and dangers which it would be hard to overestimate.

It requires no military acumen to realize that every step Washington has taken was the result of failure of its earlier steps. These new escalation moves are bound to prove just as risky and just as unsuccessful.

In South Vietnam



"Careful, Mr. Lodge, the balcony is in guerrilla territory."

Schrade in *Neues Deutschland*

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